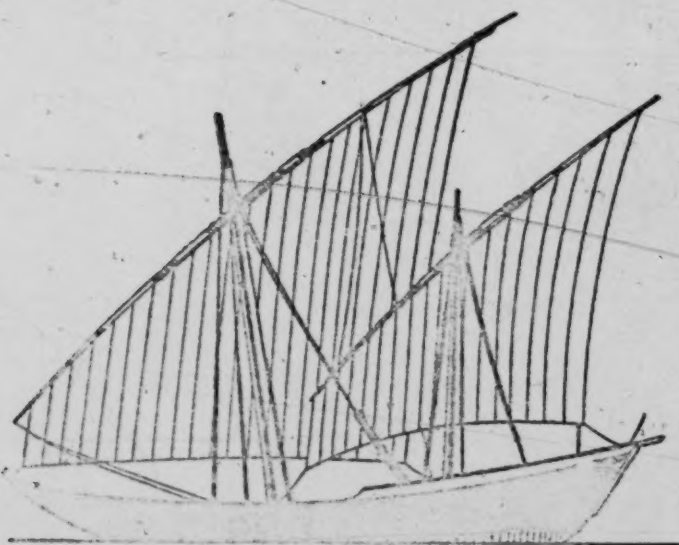


THE ARAB DHOW TRADE

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of Dar es Salaam, loaded her with mangrove poles, and brought her back to Zanzibar again, where the *nakhoda* had ostensibly been trying to assemble passengers and extra cargo for the return to Arabia but in fact had been enjoying a new harem.

Mates are paid by shares, and are, in my opinion, an oppressed class. They carry their own ventures, engage in smuggling on a

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Baggala

small scale — haberdashery, currency, and so forth — and generally keep the ship's books. They may become *nakhodas* of small *booms*, running to the Basra river; but it is unusual for a man from the more dignified deep-sea trades to descend to this. There is no social status about the *nakhoda* of a coastwise water dhow.

Ships are built by shipwrights who employ no naval architects. Both builders and riggers' lofts are unknown. The ships are put together entirely by eye and take the traditional form either of the double-ended *boom*, or the carved and embellished *baggala*, which obviously has a considerable ancestry from the Portuguese

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that any new crew members in Arab ships joined voluntarily; MA
vessels must not be overmanned, and crew and passenger lists 505
must be provided and in order; ships must be surveyed, and kept 567
seaworthy; and *nakhodas* must be certificated. As for the last, the 2
port officials conduct examinations, and the general principle 656
seems to be that if a man is capable enough to bring a dhow down
to Zanzibar, certificate or no certificate, he can also be trusted to
sail her away again. But the fee for examination is fifteen shillings,
and the Arabs complain about it.

We touched at Zanzibar again after loading in the Rufiji, re- K
embarked our *nakhoda* and took aboard a few Swahili school- MA
teachers as passengers (they proposed to hire an automobile at 439
Kuwait to take them to Mecca), filled the decks with coconuts 505
and cases of soap and vermicelli, and departed toward the Persian
Gulf again with the first of the broken weather at the end of the
northeast season. We did not await the coming of the true south-
west monsoons, for it sets in hard; we sailed direct to Muscat, in
twenty-six days.

Muscat was depressed and there was no trade there, not even
smuggling. All that changed hands, as far as I could see, was a
box of Maria Theresa thalers, enormous Austrian coins minted in
London for the Omani and available in Zanzibar at a price less
than the exchange rate in Muscat. The Arabs turned everything
to profit and were prepared to sell anything, even the ship. The
sailors' pastime in the Rufiji was buying lemons — a thousand M.A.
for a shilling — and converting them into sherbet, which they 52
hawked in the *sug* at Kuwait throughout the summer.

Our cargo of mangrove poles sold at Bahrein, the ship returned
to Kuwait, to lay up inside a coral breakwater until the new sea-
son's Iraqi dates ripened and it was time to go out again. At K
Kuwait, when all her people were returned — several relations of
the *nakhoda* had dispersed from Zanzibar back to Lamu and 451
Mogadishu to collect debts — a general balance sheet of the 465
whole round voyage was struck, the profits computed carefully, 459
and divided by a system of shares arranged traditionally. It was 505
not a straightforward statement of income and expenditure; I
never saw or heard of any piece of Arab seafaring business which
was as simple as that. It was all complicated by prior advances,

debts, odd earnings not shared and even odder earnings which were shared, and mysterious complicated procedures, some of which I never did fathom, for the war came, and stopped my investigations.

The son of the merchant family which owned our dhow, however, told me that her gross profit on the nine-month round voyage was 11,000 rupees, not including the proceeds of the crews' and officers' private ventures. But I think he exaggerated, for the total investment in the dhow was little more than that. But at any rate, the dhow's people were well satisfied and they all, save one, went back to sea with her. The *nakhoda* grew fat throughout the summer, and took a new wife, and a new boom for his brother at a cost of 10,500 rupees; and I heard no complaints from the merchants.

As far as I was able to discover, half the gross earnings went to the ship; this was the merchant's share. The cost of the food for the round voyage (which was not much, for all hands lived very simply and fishing lines were the most important equipment in what passed for her storeroom) was deducted from the other half, and the remainder was then divided by shares arranged strictly in accordance with the accepted value of each man's rating aboard. The sailor's share on the voyage which I made was reported to be 135 rupees (about \$40), whereof 35 rupees had been advanced. This was little enough for such a long voyage, and though they worked hard at all sorts of things and were ready for any kind of business, I doubt whether a sailor's earnings from other sources amounted to more than 20 or 30 rupees, clear.

I heard of dhows from Kuwait that season which were distributing less than 100 rupees; according to the Kuwaiti, who had no high opinion of them, the Suri rarely paid out more than fifty. To a sailor whose only home was the sand of the *sug* and his bed the cloak around him, whose wants were few and whose paradise was assured, even 50 rupees may be a vast sum of money. There was, at any rate, contentment throughout the Arab shipping industry as I knew it, and the quiet philosophy I learned among the simple seamen was of great help to me in the days of the long-drawn war which was soon to follow.